

PROVIDENT DISPENSARIES.



SKETCH OF THE FACTS CONNECTED
WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT

OF

The Royal Victoria Dispensary,

AT NORTHAMPTON;

WITH A

SHORT SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

OF THE WORKING OF THAT INSTITUTION,

DURING A PERIOD OF FOURTEEN YEARS;

AND

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

FOR THE

CONDUCT OF SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS.

BY

JOHN BECKE,

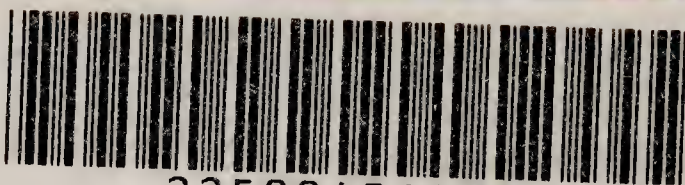
Honorary Secretary of the Royal Victoria Dispensary.

Second Edition. Printed for gratuitous Circulation only.

NORTHAMPTON: PRINTED BY CORDEUX & SONS, BRADSHAW STREET.

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TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE ROYAL VICTORIA
DISPENSARY.

Gentlemen,

The success which has attended the working of this Institution has caused many persons to apply to me for information as to our rules, our mode of working, and the success which has attended our efforts. I have found it always difficult, sometimes impossible, to give to my various correspondents information sufficiently precise and detailed for practical purposes. I therefore determined on printing such observations as I thought would be most useful to those engaged in the task of attempting to found Dispensaries on the same plan as that with which I have been for so many years connected. With this view, I, with your permission, published the first edition of this little book in the early part of 1858. The notice which has been taken of the work in the various medical journals, and the discussion which has ensued on the merits of the plans which I have advocated, have caused such a demand for the pamphlet that the first edition has been exhausted.

In preparing a second edition, I have given the history of the Royal Victoria Dispensary up to the end of the year 1859, and have added some statistical information in a tabular form, which I hope will render the book more useful.

To you, to whose exertions and constant attention the success of this Institution is mainly owing, I beg leave most respectfully to dedicate this pamphlet.

I have the honor to remain, Gentlemen,

Your faithful and obedient Servant,

JOHN BECKE, Hon. Sec.

Northampton, June, 1860,

ROYAL VICTORIA DISPENSARY.

THIS Institution was founded in the year 1845, in order to commemorate the visit of Her Majesty to the town of Northampton.

A sum of nearly £1,000 was raised by donations. A building suited for the purposes of the Institution was purchased for the sum of £800, and conveyed to the Trustees of the Charity by deed, duly enrolled. The total expenditure incurred in the purchase of the building, alterations, and repairs, with the preliminary charge, consequent upon advertising, &c., slightly exceeded £1,000.

Considerable discussion took place at the founding of the Institution, as to whether it should be opened on that which has been termed (I believe erroneously) the purely charitable plan, or on the self-supporting system, or on some combination of those plans.

Those in favor of affording gratuitous medical relief to the suffering poor, urged strongly the fact, that in a town like Northampton, there must be a large number of people who were wholly unable to pay for medical relief in the ordinary way; and who were also too poor to subscribe even the small sum which was required to constitute them subscribers of a Provident Dispensary. That this was the class which most especially needed relief. That the provident poor, and those who were able to support themselves by their own labor, were usually provided with medical aid, by means of the various Benefit Societies and Sick Clubs in the town,

The supporters of the provident plan urged that much had already been done in the way of affording gratuitous medical relief to the very poor. Subscribers to the General Infirmary at Northampton had the power of granting tickets entitling the poor to gratuitous attendance and medicine, at that noble Institution; that those of the poor who had maintained a character for respectability, and good conduct, could usually obtain tickets by application to the Governors of the Infirmary; and as to those who were of a different character, it was no hardship to them to receive the assistance of the medical officer provided by the Poor-Law Union. It was stated that many of the more respectable of the working classes, who were too poor to pay for medical relief, felt degraded by having to go about and seek for tickets for the Infirmary. Many others, on the contrary, adopted the plan of asking for tickets, as an excuse for soliciting alms. That there was a large class of cases, and these the most distressing, to which the plan of out-patient relief was wholly inapplicable, namely—those of parties who were too ill to go to the Infirmary, and required attendance at their own homes. This class of cases could only be provided for by Institutions such as this, for it was unreasonable to suppose that, in any Institution where the medical officers were wholly unremunerated, they would consent to attend upon patients at their own homes. That the experience of every one, who had much intercourse with the poor, had shown that in cases of sudden and severe sickness, much valuable time was lost by the parties being obliged to go seeking for tickets. It was also said that it was most desirable that the wives of working men should have the means of being attended, in their confinements, by competent medical men. The writer of these remarks stated that he had seen, in the course of his experience as Coroner, many cases where the lives of women and their offspring had been sacrificed by the gross ignorance of uneducated midwives.

It was shown that few if any of the Benefit Clubs in the town attempted to provide for this attendance, only one or two provided for medical attendance on the families of members. In answer to the objection, that the proposed plan would operate injuriously to the interests of the medical men—whilst it was contended as a principle, that if those interests were opposed to the well-being of a large number of the poor, the interests of the higher and richer but less numerous body, must give place to those of the poorer—it was thought that time would show that these Institutions would operate greatly to the pecuniary advantage of the medical men. That a large portion of the time given by medical men to the relief of the poor now, was, in fact, given gratuitously, or, as in the case of the medical officer of the Poor-Law Boards, at stipends ludicrously inadequate. That medical men had the greatest difficulty in obtaining payment from their poorer patients, and many a poor family had been ruined by the expenses of a protracted and serious illness. Great stress was also laid on the necessity of inducing habits of providence, forethought, and independence, on the part of the poor, particularly on the part of such of them as were heads of families. Sickness, which to a greater or less extent must be the common lot of all, should be provided for, as one of those things which must be reasonably expected, in every family. It was also remarked, that even in families in respectable and easy circumstances, it too frequently occurred that cases of sickness were not treated with sufficient promptitude, in consequence of the reluctance of parties to incur the expense of medical attendance; and, it must be obvious, that with those who were entirely dependent on labor for their support, where the cost of the “doctor’s bill” must form an item in fearful disproportion to the ordinary earnings of the bread winners of the family, there would be a great disinclination to incur that expence, except in cases of the greatest emergency, so that it generally happened that the medical attendant was not sent.

for, in the first instance, when the disease was manageable; and in cases of epidemic and contagious diseases, much valuable time was lost, whereby increased danger was incurred, not only to the family, but to the neighbourhood.

To this feeling of dread of the expense, must be attributed, also, in a great measure, the increasing spread of the various quack remedies, which have done, and continue to do, such fearful mischief.

In giving this summary of the arguments *pro* and *con*, I have not endeavoured so much to relate with accuracy, what really did take place, as to recall those considerations which weighed most in my mind, and to meet those objections which I have commonly heard advanced. Suffice it for the present to say, the promoters of the undertaking adopted the provident system, with some modifications. The leading principle of the Institution is declared by the first rule:—"The object of this Institution is, to enable the working classes to ensure for themselves and their families efficient medical advice and medicine, during illness, by their own small periodical payments, with the assistance of contributions from the more opulent."

By the rules for Free Members it is provided—

RULE 1.—"The Free Members shall consist of working persons and servants, their wives and children, not receiving parish relief, and being unable to pay for medical advice in the usual manner."

By RULE 3—"Every Free Member above 14 years of age shall pay one penny, and, under that age, one halfpenny a week; but twopence a week will be considered sufficient for a man, his wife, and all their children under 14 years of age. Servants are to pay five shillings yearly, by half-yearly payments. All payments to be made in advance, and a fine of

one penny weekly is inflicted for every week in arrear. Any Member more than five weeks in arrear is struck off the books, and no person so struck off can be re-admitted, except on appearing personally before the Committee, and assigning sufficient reason for the irregularity."

It is provided—"That all Patients, who are able, must attend at the Dispensary, at the hours of attendance of the Medical Officer whom they select; those confined to their own houses will be attended by the Medical Officer, on giving timely notice. In cases of emergency, or sudden illness, any of the Medical Officers may be sent for."

The wives of members subscribing twopence weekly are entitled to attendance during their confinements, on payment of five shillings three months previously, provided they have been members six months. To this fee of five shillings, a like amount is added from the fund subscribed by the Honorary Members, and the sum of ten shillings is paid to each medical officer for every case attended by him.

The half of the midwifery fees, and all expenses attending on the management of the Institution, are borne out of the subscriptions of the Honorary Members. The whole of the money subscribed by the poor, or Free Members, is applied first to the providing of drugs and medical appliances, (all of which are ordered and provided by the Medical Officers, without any interference by the Committee,) and the balance is divided amongst the medical men, in proportion to the number of cases attended by them.

Much discussion arose as to the number of medical men that ought to be appointed. The late Mr. Smith, of Southam, whose opinion was certainly entitled to great respect, thought it ought to be thrown open to every medical practitioner in the

town who wished to join it. I and others believed, that by thus dividing responsibility, we should greatly diminish the efficiency of the medical staff—that some would join simply because they did not wish to see their names omitted, but to whom the remuneration would not be an object, and all labor distasteful; that if the number of officers was limited, and the appointments subject to competition, only those would seek for the appointments who were anxious to obtain them, and who were ready to do the work. These considerations prevailed only to a limited extent; a compromise was effected, by which six Medical Officers were elected. I expressed the fear then, that this would not be found to work, the numbers being too great, and wished only three to be appointed, but the experiment was tried with six. Difficulties and misunderstandings arose among the Medical Officers in the first year, when one gentleman resigned, and in the second year two more resigned, since then the whole work has been carried on by three Medical Officers, with comfort to themselves, and to the entire satisfaction of the Committee, and of the patients. My experience, on this point, has satisfied me, that for such Institutions to work well, the number of Medical Men must be limited to the actual requirements of the patients.

That this Dispensary has worked well, not only in respect to the good it has done to the poor, but also with reference to the interests of the Medical Officers, will be apparent to any one who will take the trouble of studying the tabular statement annexed, showing the results of the work done during fifteen years.

Year.	Amount received from Free Members.		Cases attended	Midwifery Cases attended	Amount paid for Drugs.	Amount paid to Medical Officers.	Honorary Subscriptions and Donations.
		£ s. d.			£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
1845	Free Members' Payments	23 14 1	230	8	63 0 8	38 4 1	S 29 8 0
	Midwifery Fees	2 10 0					D 996 9 6
1846	Free Members' Payments	133 4 3	1780	66	72 17 0	116 4 3	S 90 9 0
	Midwifery Fees	19 5 0					D 193 11 3
1847	Free Members' Payments	237 16 5	3186	97	145 7 7	140 18 10	S 145 11 0
	Midwifery Fees	25 15 0					D 163 12 0
1848	Free Members' Payments	309 17 7	4841	128	155 6 3	218 11 4	S 126 1 6
	Midwifery Fees	32 2 6					D 19 10 0
1849	Free Members' Payments	379 18 0½	8085	133	213 12 2	307 19 4	S 152 14 6
*	Midwifery Fees	34 17 6					D 91 10 6
1850	Free Members' Payments	408 11 1	9248	184	308 15 6½	189 17 6	S 177 15 6
	Midwifery Fees	43 10 0					D 86 9 0
1851	Free Members' Payments	453 2 4	8033	218	162 18 2	399 4 2	S 167 17 6
	Midwifery Fees	56 5 0					D 33 19 0

Up to this period I am unable to show, separately, the amounts received for "Fines" and "Cards," both those items being included in that of "Free Members' Payments."

1852	Free Members' Payments	400 7 11	8358	229	118 3 0	429 3 2	S 152 11 6
	Fines... ..	27 14 1					D 33 1 6
	Cards... ..	4 14 2					
	Midwifery Fees	53 10 0					
1853	Free Members' Payments	412 3 1	7491	182	138 19 2	396 15 11	S 156 9 11
	Fines... ..	27 17 3					D 27 5 0
	Cards	4 14 9					
	Midwifery Fees	52 5 0					
1854	Free Members' Payments	417 12 4	7270	189	108 15 2	438 15 11	S 159 8 6
	Fines... ..	30 6 1					D 147 16 0
	Cards	5 2 8					
	Midwifery Fees	52 5 0					
1855	Free Members' Payments	441 0 3	8044	186	169 15 10	402 0 7	S 168 5 0
	Fines... ..	32 5 4					D 34 2 0
	Cards	5 10 10					
	Midwifery Fees	54 10 0					
1856	Free Members' Payments	534 1 8	9760	179	208 17 5	457 9 9	S 157 18 6
	Fines... ..	36 5 5					D 15 6 11
	Cards	6 10 1					
	Midwifery Fees	55 5 0					
1857	Free Members' Payments	585 1 9	11960	222	166 16 5	578 16 3	S 199 2 6
	Fines... ..	42 0 3					D 36 19 0
	Cards	7 10 8					
	Midwifery Fees	69 10 0					
1858	Free Members' Payments	661 8 8	10690	241	186 13 4	652 11 5	S 179 18 6
	Fines... ..	49 17 1					D 20 16 2
	Cards	7 9 0					
	Midwifery Fees	74 5 0					
1859	Free Members' Payments	711 4 10	10796	189	201 13 0	604 1 10	S 198 2 0
	Fines... ..	53 0 3					D 174 17 1
	Cards	8 10 6					
	Midwifery Fees	55 10 0					

* In the year 1849 the Cholera was prevalent in the Town. All persons attacked by that disease, or its premonitory symptoms, were attended gratuitously by the Medical Officers, and all prescriptions for the poor made up at the Dispensary, without charge. Several Donations were received from a fund raised for that purpose, which were carried to the Free Members' Fund.

A reference to this table will show that the amount divided amongst the Medical Officers, yearly, is very large. Indeed, many persons now have reversed the objections formerly raised, and cry out that this Institution is solely for the benefit of the Medical Officers; but on comparing the receipts with the account of the number of cases attended, it will be seen, however large the amount appears, it barely affords an adequate remuneration for the attention, skill, and care which the Medical Officers have bestowed on their numerous patients; but, at the same time, it must be borne in mind, that the number of cases by no means represents an actual amount of sickness to that extent. The Medical Officers enter in the books every case, including, of course, an immense number of children brought to the Dispensary, when suffering from any trifling indisposition, and this I believe to be one of the great advantages of the Institution—that children are no longer quacked by the next door neighbour, or prescribed for by the druggist, over the counter, on the mother's statement, but are brought at once under the care of qualified practitioners.

One of the great difficulties in Institutions of this kind is to fix on any general rule for the admission of Free Members. Every one acquainted with the subject knows that many people, who are well able to pay for medical advice, will not scruple to apply to any Institution where they can get it gratuitously, and many will rather go without it than pay for it. Every Medical Officer of the Hospitals in London, complains that many persons receive relief who ought to be above applying for it, and I am sure that many cases of the kind occur in country towns. Where tickets are given by individual Governors, the choice of the recipients must, in a great measure, be left to their discretion; but where a Committee has to deal with the question, it is clear that some general rule must be adopted, and it is difficult to fix upon any such rule.

In this Institution, we, at an early period, adopted the following Bye-Law :

“That it is the opinion of this Committee that all artisans and labourers, working as journeymen, should be considered as proper persons to be admitted, without reference to the rate of wages which they may be receiving ; and that the circumstance of the wives of any of them keeping a shop* shall not operate as a disqualification ; but that no person filling the situation of a foreman, or earning his living solely by keeping a shop, should be admitted ; it being also understood that no widow or single woman keeping a shop shall be considered as included in the disqualification.”

It must be admitted that this rule is not free from objection. In the class of skilled artisans, we have many members who are earning from thirty to forty shillings weekly, and those of them who are provident are very well off, and could, with ease, pay for medical advice ; but it too frequently happens, with men of this class, that their wages are spent too freely ; thence, they are much worse off than men who earn much less, and it is clear, to reject the provident, and to receive the improvident, would not be right. Neither would it be politic or just to attempt a rigid investigation into the circumstances of every family. Again, it was thought the rate of wages alone might be a guide ; but the working classes soon shewed that a man with a large family, earning thirty shillings weekly, was not so well off as a man with half the income and a smaller family ; besides which, there are a variety of circumstances that must be taken into account, in judging of the ability of the family to pay for medical relief. A man with a sickly wife, or with collateral relations to support, is always under difficulties. I consider the rule we have adopted practically works well. With upwards of 6,000

* Parties keeping beer-shops or public-houses are not eligible.

members on the books, we do not receive complaints of more than five or six families yearly, being in circumstances such as to enable them to pay for relief, and these families are always expelled, although nothing is more difficult than to withstand their argument—"Well, Sir, if we had not been more careful and economical than our neighbours, we should have been worse off than they, and it is hard to turn us off because we have toiled and saved." Of course, in all these undertakings, individual cases must occur where a Committee will err on one side or the other; but the rules adopted are such as to prevent many such instances occurring. The plan pursued, and which I recommend for adoption, is this:—

The business of the Institution is conducted by a Committee of eighteen, who meet every Friday evening, at Seven, great pains being taken to ensure punctuality. Before this Committee is laid a book, which contains the name, address, and occupation of every person applying for admission, with the name of the Medical Officer by whom the person may wish to be attended. This book lies open, on the table, all the week, and the medical men (who are all *ex-officio* Members of the Committee,) are invited to inspect it. If the name of the applicant is known to any of the Committee, or the Dispenser, the word "proper" is written in a column kept for that purpose, or any observation calculated to shew that the application ought not to be acceded to, as, for instance, "is a foreman," "a shopkeeper," "has house property," "has been in before," "one of the family ill," &c., &c., or private information may be sent to the Secretary, to the same effect.

At the Meeting of the Committee, every Friday evening, the list is read over, the names of those respecting whom sufficient information has been obtained, are marked at once, but those cases which require investigation are handed to the different members of the Committee, each Committee-man taking a district, and making personal enquiries. The list

thus read is marked, presented to the Committee with the date, and the applications stand over until the next weekly meeting, the book still being exposed on the table as before, for any Member to write his observations. On the following week, the whole of these names, with the observations and report of the Member investigating each case, is read, and each application is decided on its own merits, the name of the Committeeman on whose report the case has been decided being entered in the book. In addition to this, the Medical Officer, when called in to attend any Member of a family, has the opportunity of judging of the circumstances in which that family is placed; and if the result of his observation be such as to induce him to believe that the family ought not to have been admitted, or from improved circumstances are no longer entitled to relief, he can report formally to the Committee, or by a private communication to the Secretary, or any Member of the Committee, get the case investigated. As a general rule, it is not desirable for Medical Officers to be known as the channel through which complaints of this kind reach the Committee, as it may detract from their popularity with their patients: it is always felt to be better that these complaints should come through the Secretary, or some Member of the Committee.

By adopting these precautions, I think this Institution has, in a great measure, avoided the difficulties attendant upon the selection of Free Members. During fourteen years, I have not had more than fifty cases brought before me in which it was alleged that the parties admitted were in such circumstances as to disentitle them to the benefit of the Institution; and in such cases the Members have, generally speaking, been induced to withdraw.

There have been a great many cases in which we have been compelled to refuse the applications of small shopkeepers and others ineligible according to the bye-law of the Com-

mittee, where it would have been a great charity to admit them ; and I have known persons refused relief at this Institution as being able to pay for medical aid in the ordinary manner, go without advice until they could get tickets to admit them into the Infirmary, and others who were compelled to incur bills which they had no means of paying ; but such difficulties must always occur in large undertakings—laws must be framed for the masses. It is impossible for human beings to propound any scheme so perfect that it will, under no possible circumstances, press harshly on individuals.

On the other hand, I have frequently induced persons to withdraw their applications, who, although qualified according to rule, yet were, to my knowledge, independent of all such aid. A Committee, such as that with which I have had the honour of acting for so many years, composed of men of business, well acquainted with the working classes in the Town, and working harmoniously and cordially together, will not find any practical difficulty in dealing with all cases of application. It is rarely that any difference of opinion arises in the Committee on any such points.

Having described the mode of application, I will now proceed to show the course we pursue with reference to the Members. Each person is told to call for his card on any day after the next Friday but one following the date of his application. [I should have stated that each person, on applying for admission, pays one month in advance, which sum is returned to him, if rejected.] On the admission of a Free Member, he receives a card, with the rules, which he has to observe, printed on the back.* On the card, the money he has paid is entered, and the dates are given when all his payments, during the year, are to be made. As these cards are filled up, they are returned to the Dispenser, and fresh cards issued.

* The form in which these Cards are printed is shewn in the appendix.

A Collector is appointed, who attends every Tuesday afternoon, to receive the payments of Free Members. He is provided with a book called the "Receiving Book," duly ruled with columns for weekly payments, fines, and midwifery fees. On each Member coming to the pay table, he hands the card to the Dispenser, who calls out how much there is to pay, and, on receiving the money, enters the amount on the card, whilst the Collector sees that the money is correct, and enters the amount, with the Member's number, in his book. The Collector and Dispenser compare the book and card, to see that the entries correspond, then the card is returned to the Member, who has to produce it to the Medical Officer, whenever he applies for relief. If the Medical Officers will only take the trouble of looking at these cards, they will prevent the possibility of the Institution being imposed upon, as they will see, at a glance, whether the patient is in arrear. When the Dispenser and Collector get accustomed to their work, they can conduct this part of the business with great celerity, and entire accuracy. We now average from 280 to 340 separate receipts every Tuesday. The room is opened from half-past Two until Four, and the work is usually got through in that time. It very much assists the Dispenser and Collector, if one or more Members of the Committee attend on pay days, to keep order, &c. All persons, who are five weeks in arrear, are erased from the books, and the Collector cannot receive their money, without their appearing before the Committee, who are always strict in enquiry into their circumstances, before they will grant them re-admission, and who impose such terms as they think fit.

A "Register of Re-Admissions" is kept, and the Committee are very reluctant to re-admit any person a second time, unless it can be clearly shewn that the second default arose from inadvertence or uncontrollable circumstances. This I consider by far the most perplexing duty that falls on the Committee.

It has been suggested that the privilege of re-admission is often grossly abused by persons who only pay whilst receiving or expecting to receive medical relief, and discontinue their payments, relying upon getting re-admitted when again overtaken by sickness; and that, therefore, it would be prudent to abolish this rule altogether, and not to re-admit any one; or, at all events, not until after a certain period of expulsion, or without a heavy fine; but I think the better plan is, not to lay down any fixed rule, but to leave each case to be dealt with by the Committee. In many instances, the neglect of payment has arisen from the pressure of poverty, aggravated by sickness: in such a case, to impose a fine would be equivalent to expulsion, and to withdraw the medical relief would be cruel. A temporary suspension is always unwise, for the members of the family are frequently kept without advice until the period of admission, when medical aid may perhaps be too late. But the privilege of re-admission is one which, in all Institutions, should be most strictly guarded, as it leaves open a door to abuse.

There is one class of applicants for re-admission that especially requires careful watching—women who have been attended during their confinements, then discontinued their payments, should, in my judgment, never be re-admitted, nor should those who have been admitted during sickness, and discontinued their payments soon after being restored to health.

I have been frequently asked respecting our mode of book-keeping. It is impossible to explain this accurately without the aid of the books themselves. It would not be possible to print specimens of these books in the form of a pamphlet, and I have not the means, at present, of supplying

the numerous persons who have applied to me with specimen sheets of the books, though I have reason to believe that specimen sheets will be printed.

The books employed by us are as follows :

1.—The Application Book.

2.—The Register of *admitted* patients, in which is kept the record of the Medical Officer selected by each Member, and from which, at the end of the year, the account of the payment due to the Medical Officer is made up.

3.—The Medical Register, containing the reports of the Medical Officers on the cases brought before them.

4.—The Register of Re-Admissions.

5.—The Collector's Receiving Book, which contains the account of the monies received weekly, and which monies are paid into the Bank on the day after they are received, and the Bank Book checked with the Receiver's Book.

6.—The Secretary's Cash Book, containing columns properly ruled, so that every item is at once entered, to the debit or credit of the Fund to which it belongs, and which therefore acts, to a certain extent, as a ledger.

It will be seen that this appears, at first sight, a complicated system of book-keeping ; but, with a Secretary of ordinary intelligence, it will work well and simply, and each book will act as a check on all the others. The importance of good book-keeping cannot too strongly be insisted on

There is one point which should be discussed and carefully settled at the outset of all such undertakings, and that is, the manner in which the Free Members' Fund should be divided between the Medical Officers.

Our Rules formerly provided "That the Fund shall be divided at the end of each year by the Committee, among the Medical Officers, according to the number and description of cases attended by them. The Midwifery Fees shall be paid to the respective Medical Officers who shall have attended the cases."

For the first year or two, the attempt was made to range the cases into two or three distinct classes, and to apportion a high rate of remuneration to those cases requiring very many attendances at home; a lower rate for every case attended once at home; and the lowest rate for those attended only at the Dispensary; but it was found that to do this properly involved a considerable amount of toil on the Medical Officers, the Secretary, and the Committee, and, practically, the result was much the same as if the money had been divided according to the number, without reference to the description of the cases. But the working of this plan during the last three or four years has not been satisfactory to me. I therefore suggested to the Medical Officers of this Institution, in the early part of the year 1858, that I thought it would be the fairest plan to call on each Free Member to state by what Medical Officer he would wish himself and family to be attended, and to enter this in the Register, and to divide the Funds between the Medical Officers, according to the number of the Free Members appearing on the Register, as attached to the respective Medical Officers. All cheerfully acceded to this, which is now being acted upon, and which plan I would strongly recommend to all similar Institutions.

The Rule, as altered at a General Meeting, now stands thus :

"The Free Members' Fund, consisting of the ordinary Subscriptions of Free Members, shall defray the costs of drugs and all ordinary medical appliances, and the remainder of the

Fund shall be divided at the end of each year among the Medical Officers in ordinary, according to the number of families and paying Members who may enter under them respectively each year. The payments, by Free Members, for Fines and Cards will be carried to the Honorary Fund."

One of the medical gentlemen suggested that the Funds should be equally divided amongst them, each undertaking still to attend to every patient who chose to select him—and this proposition was made by the gentleman to whose pecuniary interest such a plan would be most prejudicial; but I considered, from the working of Institutions where the Fund had been thus divided, that the operation of such a Rule would ultimately be to throw an undue proportion of the labour on one, to the exclusion of the others.

Another important question to decide is, as to what should be the amount of Subscription of Free Members. This is a subject which has often been discussed, and to which I have given the most careful consideration, and I am satisfied that the sum which is fixed by our rules (four-pence a month for a single person, and eight-pence a month for a family,) is the best sum we could have fixed on, with reference to this locality; but I think it is possible that a larger sum might be paid in some localities, where the workmen are better paid than at Northampton. I believe, however, that it would be found that healthy families would be reluctant to pay more. In some places, where wages are very low, it might be necessary to fix a lower rate; but, where this was done, some additional funds should be raised for the remuneration of the Medical Men. It has very frequently been discussed here, whether it would not be prudent to divide the Free Members into two classes, as, for instance, for all those earning under one pound weekly to pay sixpence, all those earning above one pound, or being in the class of shopkeepers or foremen, to pay one shilling. In small towns, this might perhaps be prac-

ticable, as in such places, each case might be dealt with on its own merits ; but, I fear, it would give rise to much jealousy and ill feeling between the Free Members, besides causing an immense deal of trouble to the persons having the management. My experience would certainly lead me to prefer a uniform rate, and to confine the operations of these Institutions to the working classes.

An important consideration, in any new Institution, will be whether any and what assistance should be given in midwifery cases. It will be seen, by the reports of the Northampton Dispensary, that the sum added to the Medical Fund forms a large item of the expenditure of the Honorary Fund for each year, and this item of expenditure, increasing with the growth of the Institution, has already caused us much anxiety, and will, I fear, be a permanent cause of embarrassment. I am free to confess that if, with my present experience, I had the forming of a similar Institution, I should hesitate before incurring this expense. I am quite conscious of the very great boon our present plan is to the Free Members ; I am satisfied that it is the chief inducement for many to continue constant payers, and that it is most serviceable to that class of Members who are struggling with the difficulties attendant on an increasing family ; and yet I should rather avoid this large item of expense. When an Institution is in full operation, it is difficult to withdraw any advantage or privilege that was offered at the onset. I should prefer attaching a Benevolent Fund to the Institution, the subscribers to which would have the privilege of nominating one or more persons to be attended in their confinements, on payment of five shillings ; but this must be worked with caution—any system of selection being apt to produce jealousies.

The system of sick admission, too, is one which requires careful handling. Parties who desire to enter whilst labouring under sickness are required by us to pay an additional fee of

five shillings. This system is certainly liable to abuse. Many families have entered when labouring under severe illness; have continued members so long as the illness lasted; but immediately on being restored to health have discontinued their payments. For years, I have carefully watched the operation of our rules, and have contemplated and discussed several proposed alterations; but the result of mature deliberation has been to convince me, that no scheme that I am able to devise, or that has yet been suggested to me, will answer better than that which we now pursue. I have lately been vexed to find that the number of sick admissions is greatly increasing, and thought of trying to remedy the evil by increasing the sick fee to ten shillings, and giving the party paying it the benefit of six months' attendance without further subscription; but I fear this would operate greatly to the disadvantage of those we are most anxious to relieve—the necessitous poor—for, to such, the payment of ten shillings would be a very serious matter.

In conclusion, I cannot too strongly urge the claims of these Institutions on the Clergy, and those who have the interests of the poor at heart. By means of Provident Dispensaries, the best medical aid can be obtained for the poor, without any considerable outlay on the part of the rich, and without calling upon the medical men to sacrifice their time without reward. The system of making the Free Members contribute, encourages in them habits of providence and forethought, and raises a feeling of independence, whilst, at the same time, they feel they have the assistance and support of their more fortunate and highly favored brethren.

JOHN BECKE.

APPENDIX OF FORMS.

[No. 1.—*Form of Midwifery Ticket.*]

No. _____

ROYAL VICTORIA DISPENSARY.

NOTICE TO MEDICAL OFFICERS OF REQUIRED ATTENDANCE.

Name of Patient _____

Address _____

Date of Admission _____

Date of Payment _____

When Attendance required _____

Name of Medical Officer _____

MEDICAL OFFICER'S CERTIFICATE.

This Case was attended by me _____

Signature _____

[No. 1.—*Back.*]

KEEP THIS CARD CLEAN.

THE PATIENTS ARE REQUIRED TO TAKE NOTICE—

That if the Medical Officer whom they have chosen cannot be met with, either of the other Medical Gentlemen will attend them, on this Card and the Admission Card being produced; but no Patient can expect the attendance of the Medical Officer, unless the two Cards be produced by the person who is sent for him.

In every case THIS Card must be given up to the Gentleman who attends, and returned by him to the Dispenser, within seven days from the attendance.

Patients must distinctly understand, that unless their payments are regularly entered upon their Cards, and unless they are entitled to Midwifery attendance, under Rule 9, they must expect to pay the fee of 10s. 6d. to the Medical Gentleman who attends them.

Under Rule 9, no Patient can be attended in her confinement, unless she has been a member at least six months, and has paid the 5s. at least three months before she requires attendance.

[No. 2.—*Form of Admission Ticket.*]

MR. _____ (Medical Officer's Name.)

No.

ROYAL VICTORIA DISPENSARY.

No.

Residing _____

By Occupation _____

This _____ day of _____ admitted a Member.

_____ Dispenser.

Payments due.	Mem.	Pence.	Fines.	Mid.	Fee.	Total.	When recd.	Recd. by
	Jan...							
	Feb...							
	Mar..							
	April.							
	May..							
	June.							
	July..							
	Aug..							
	Sept..							
	Oct...							
	Nov..							
	Dec...							

Parties wishing to consult the Medical Officer, must attend punctually at the Dispensary at Nine in the Morning. Medicines supplied daily (Sundays excepted,) from Nine to Twelve, and from Four to Five o'Clock.

8. Those Patients who are able must attend at the Dispensary at the appointed hours, bringing their admission ticket. Those who are too ill to attend at the Dispensary must send their tickets before Nine o'Clock in the Morning to the Medical Officer by whom they wish to be attended, and he will visit them at their own homes.

[No. 2.—*Back.*]

RULES FOR FREE MEMBERS.

1.—That Free Members shall consist of working persons and servants, their wives and children, not receiving parish relief, and being unable to pay for medical advice in the usual manner.

2.—Any such person wishing to become a Free Member, shall leave his or her name, age, residence, and occupation, at the Dispensary, and deposit one month's subscription, which will be returned if the depositor be not admitted a Member.

3.—Every Free Member, above fourteen years of age, shall pay one penny, and under that age, one halfpenny a week; but twopence a week will be considered sufficient for a man, his wife, and all his children under fourteen years of age. Servants who may be judged eligible by the Committee, shall pay five shillings a year, and in not less than half-yearly payments.

4.—The payments of the Free Members shall be made in advance. No one in arrear will be entitled to the benefits of the Institution; and each Family or Member shall *pay a fine of one penny for the arrear of every week. If any Member be more than five weeks in arrear, his or her name shall be erased from the books.*

5.—No one actually labouring under sickness can be admitted a Free Member unless he pay an entrance fee of five shillings, in addition to the usual weekly Subscription, and all his family enter at the same time.

6.—If any Free Member shall, through improved circumstances or otherwise, be, in the opinion of the Committee, no longer eligible to the benefits of the Institution, his or her name shall be erased from the books.

7.—Every Free Member shall have the choice of whichever Medical Officer he may prefer; but he shall not change his medical attendant during his illness, without the sanction of the Committee.

8.—Those patients who are able must attend at the Dispensary at the appointed hours, bringing their admission ticket. Those who are too ill to attend at the Dispensary must send their tickets before Nine o'Clock in the morning to the Medical Officer by whom they wish to be attended, and he will visit them at their own homes. In cases of accident or sudden illness, they can have the attendance of any one of the Medical Officers, on sending their admission ticket to his residence. No Free Member will be visited at his own house, if he reside beyond the limits of the Borough.

9.—Any married woman subscribing, with her family, twopence a week, may have, during her confinement, the attendance of whichever Medical Officer she may prefer, on depositing at the Dispensary five shillings *three months* previously. The same amount will be added to the fee of the Medical Officer out of the Honorary Fund. No woman will be entitled to the benefit of this rule, *unless she and her family have been Members, at least six months.*

10.—Patients must find their own bottles.

11.—The Children of Free Members may be vaccinated on any morning at Nine o'Clock.

12.—The Medical Officers will attend at the Dispensary, every day, except Sunday, in the following order:—

DR. FAIRCLOTH on MONDAYS and THURSDAYS...

MR. DODD on TUESDAYS and FRIDAYS

DR. BARR on WEDNESDAYS and SATURDAYS

Dentist—MR. WILKINS on MONDAYS.....

} At Nine o'Clock in
the Morning.

13.—Any Patient having cause of complaint, is to make such complaint to the Honorary Secretary, who will enter it in a book to be appropriated to that purpose, and lay it before the next meeting of the Committee.

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The Free Members' Payments received at the Dispensary on Tuesdays, from  
Two until half-past Three o'clock.



SICK ADMISSION TICKET.

DR.

PATIENT.

No.

Date

Amount Paid



SICK ADMISSION TICKET.

Dr.

Patient.

Name

Date

Amount Paid

The bearer has paid the amount above-mentioned and is entitled to immediate attendance, subject to the further order of the Committee.

The Patient is required to Take Notice, that if he has been in the Dispensary before, he is not entitled to re-enter.

No Shopkeeper or Foreman in a factory is entitled to enter; the Dispensary being only intended for the use of parties supporting themselves by their own labour—unable to pay for medical relief in the ordinary way.

If any person enters as sick who is not entitled to relief under the above rules, his deposit-money will be forfeited, and he will not be entitled to attendance.

This Ticket must be exchanged for one of the regular Cards within a month from this date, and the next payment made at that time.

Servants may pay half-yearly in advance, but should call for their Cards within the month.

Patients requiring attendance at their own homes must give notice to their medical adviser before Nine in the morning.

N.B.—No Patient who has been admitted when sick, and discontinued payment, can be re-admitted.



